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HUSSERL AND THE PROBLEM OF ANIMAL¹

Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to give an overview of Husserl's attempts to unfold the phenomenon of animal consciousness, and particularly the lowest level of subjectivity. I wanted to show that in this context Husserl's notion of life had a peculiar importance. The phenomenon of life for Husserl was essentially the inner, mental activity of a subject or consciousness. Husserl understood life as a perpetual process of self-normalization; according to him, life normalizes itself on different levels of complexity. The reconstruction of the lowest level of subjectivity is at the same time the reconstruction of the lowest level and most rudimentary form of self-normalization of life.

Husserl had fundamentally three ways to approach the problem of animal mind: empathy, eidetic variation and dismantling-deconstructive reflection ("Abbau") on the own subjectivity of the phenomenologist. The first refers to the problem of empathizing with anomalous subjects (such as an animal), and to the question, how wide is the range of empathy, and towards which living beings could we be empathic, in a phenomenologically legitimate way? The second is to grasp the eidetic (essential) structures of consciousness in general, and remove eidetic moments and structures from it, and see, which are the most fundamental structures of subjectivity, without which no consciousness could be conceived at all. The third way is the dismantling-deconstructive approach of one's own consciousness. The subjectivity in general appears as having several main layers, and the phenomenologist abstracts from the higher layer, in order to reach the deepest one. Once the lowest level is disclosed in this way, a subject could be reconstructed who possesses only the most fundamental, simplest structures and elements of subjectivity.

Keywords: Edmund Husserl, phenomenology of the animal, phenomenology of life, normativity, minimal mind

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Introduction²

Though the problem of animal mind was not a central issue in Edmund Husserl's life's work, he had been dealing with this topic ever since he had treated the problem of intersubjectivity in detail for the first time (around 1904/05),³ until the end of his career. Perhaps it was not a central theme for him, but most definitely an important one. In this essay I will try to show why we should regard this topic as a crucial problem of philosophy, and in particular, phenomenology. I will attempt to show how the question of animal mind could serve as a leading clue in understanding in general the fundamental nature of subjectivity and its origins.

The problem of animal consciousness should generally be regarded as a crucial question of philosophy from at least two points of view. Firstly, from *ethical* regard. If animals are sensitive beings, similar to humans, then it has normative implications, according to which we should take into consideration their special needs if we want to treat them in a morally acceptable way. Secondly, as indicated, from the *ontological* point of view; in regard to the question concerning the *line of demarcation* (if there is such a thing) that separates conscious beings from non-conscious ones. In the present essay this latter approach will be the most important for us.

We should at once note, that it is not without question to draw the line of demarcation of conscious and non-conscious beings at the border of the kingdom of animals; excluding every other organism (plants, fungi, microbes, etc.) from the sphere of conscious individuals. There are philosophical and scientific conceptions, which attribute consciousness even to beings below the level of animals; there are philosophers and scientists who attribute consciousness to plants, even to microbes. We find such theories, according to which, "consciousness" and "life" are overlapping notions; which means that each and every particular living being has a certain form of consciousness *in the strict sense*; as explicit phenomenal awareness; (such as sensations of light and pain). We can label this standing-point as *biopsychism*.⁴ However, as far as I know, we need very serious shifts of paradigm in mainstream scientific researches concerning subjectivity if we want to attribute consciousness in the strict sense to organisms below the level of animals. Therefore, we assume that the line of division between beings with and without consciousness, might somehow correspond to the division of animals and living beings below

² I would like to say thank you to Anna Kruza, David Morgan and Alice Pugliese for their contribution to this article.

³ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1893-1912)*, ed. by Thomas Vongehr and Regula Giuliani, Springer, New York, 2005, p. 21.

⁴ According to this, every living being is conscious for a certain degree. We can find such a position e.g. in Lynn Margulis. See e.g. L. MARGULIS, "The conscious cell", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2001, pp. 55–70.

the level of animals. If this assumption is right, then the question is, what makes animals – and the bodily constitution of animals – capable of conscious experience.

Husserl did not have a systematically articulated, final standing-point regarding the question of the borders of conscious and non-conscious beings in nature. There are textual places, where he says that only animals – with a nervous system – are capable of consciousness.⁵ But we can find others, according to which the domains of organic life and consciousness are overlapping; and every single living being has a certain sort of consciousness; even plants, fungi and microbes.⁶ As indicated earlier, in this study we will basically follow *the first standing-point*, according to which only animals have consciousness in the strict sense, and the sphere of beings with consciousness in the strict sense is limited to animals.

A central concept in this context is Husserl's notion of *life*, which he understands first and foremost as the inner, immanent life of *consciousness*. After Husserl publically and emphatically confronted the contemporary philosophies of life (in particular Dilthey) in his 1911 essay "Philosophy as Rigorous Science",⁷ he slowly started to get closer to the philosophy of life, at least to a transcendently and phenomenologically revised version of it. In his "Bernauer Manuscripts" on time-consciousness (1917/18),⁸ the notion of life, interpreted as a fundamental characteristic of consciousness, was a key concept. It referred to the *dynamic* and *flexible* nature of consciousness, and that it is never mechanistic, not even on the hyletic level (i.e. on the level of pure sensations). This conception of phenomenology as a kind of philosophy of life became even stronger in Husserl in the 1920s and '30s. In a manuscript from 1927 he said: "According to its fundamental character phenomenology thus is a *scientific* philosophy of life".⁹ In Husserl's interpretation life – which, in this context he basically understands as the mental activity of a subject or consciousness – it organizes itself on different levels, and appears with different degrees of complexity and activity.

⁵ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil. 1929-35*, ed. by Iso Kern, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1973, p. 432. (Hereafter: *Intersubjektivität III*).

⁶ Sometimes he speaks about "plant monads" (where "monad" for him is "the fully concretion of the transcendental ego") (see: *Intersubjektivität III*, 595f), and even about "unicellular monads" (see: *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929-1934). Die C-Manuskripte*, ed. by Dieter Lohmar, Springer, New York, 2006, pp. 169, 174f, [hereafter: *C-Manuskripte*]).

⁷ E. HUSSERL, *Aufsätze und Vorträge. 1911-1921. Mit ergänzenden Texten*, ed. by Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1986, pp. 3-62.

⁸ E. HUSSERL, *Die 'Bernauer Manuskripte' über das Zeitbewußtsein (1917/18)*, ed. by Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2001.

⁹ E. HUSSERL, *Natur und Geist: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1927*, ed. by Michael Weiler, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2001, p. 241.

Normalization is a fundamental function of life.¹⁰ It normalizes itself; which means: it creates the norms of its own functioning; it sustains these norms, and changes, rearticulates them if necessary, or if they are expedient. The capacity of normalization and renormalization is what makes a living being capable of flexible adaptation to its *environment*. This capability grants it flexibility and adaptivity. The flow of experiences constantly normalizes itself to represent the envioning world and its circumstances in an adequate way, and the experiencing living being normalizes its behaviour to adapt to the changing relations and novelties of the surroundings. The *community* of living beings also normalizes its social relationships and connections on the collective level. Life has an intrinsically normative character; and normativity appears on different levels of complexity, which is correlated to the complexity of life itself.

The main thesis of this present study is that the phenomenological investigations concerning the deeper levels of life could shed light on the origins of consciousness in the natural world. Husserl, as indicated earlier, was *hesitant* whether or not to attribute consciousness in the strict sense to living beings below the level of animals. In a manuscript from 1931/'32 e.g. he calls plants “inanimate” (“unbeseelte”) entities.¹¹ Despite the conflicting textual places, we – as mentioned earlier – treat animals as conscious beings in the strict sense; but leave open the possibility to attribute to living beings beneath the level of animals – such as plants – a certain sort of consciousness in a wider sense of the word; that is to say: proto-mind or proto-self.¹² But the chief purpose of our paper is to contribute to the explanation of the emergence of consciousness in the strict sense; that is to say: of *phenomenal, lived experience*. In our interpretation, only animals could possess such a consciousness.

Husserl basically had three ways to approach animal mind or consciousness. The *first* is *empathy*, which is for him *a peculiar type of intentionality* that presents us the other subject in its ineliminable otherness. For empathy, the animal appears as an *anomalous* or *abnormal type of subject*. The main questions in this context are: *how far* could empathy intelligibly reach?

¹⁰ Cf. “This point of view is that of vital *normativity*. Even for an amoeba, living means preference and exclusion”. G. CANGUILHEM, *The Normal and the Pathological*, Trans. by Carolyn R. Fawcett and Robert S. Cohen, Zone Books, New York, 1991, p. 136.

¹¹ E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität III*, p. 432. Cf. also: M. VERGANI, “Husserl’s Hesitant Attempts to Extend Personhood to Animals”, *Husserl Studies* 2020, p. 6. There is a place in *Ideas III* about “lower level souls”, “soul without a subject” (“subjektlose Seele”), which – in Vergani’s interpretation – should refer to plants. (In Husserl: *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Drittes Buch: Die Phänomenologie und die Fundamente der Wissenschaften*, ed. by Marly Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1971, p. 116. Hereafter: *Ideen III*).

¹² Cf. M. SEGUNDO-ORTIN, “A book review of Chauncey Maher, *Plant minds: A philosophical defense*, New York, Routledge, 2017”, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 2020, p. 1. Also: C. MAHER, *Plant minds: A philosophical defense*, Routledge, New York, 2017, p. 115.

Which types of entities could we constitute through empathy in a phenomenologically legitimate way as we do with conscious subjects? Where are the limits of empathy?¹³ The *second* way is the method of *eidetic variations*. We *variate* the fundamental structure of consciousness in an imaginative way in order to reconstruct possibly the most primitive sort of subjectivity.¹⁴ The *third* way is closely connected to the second, and it is the method of the *dismantling-deconstructive* (“Abbau”) approach of one’s own subjectivity. It means that the phenomenologist attempts to abstract from the higher layers of consciousness, and tries to “dig down” to the deepest level of subjectivity, and then tries to reconstruct a subject who only has those structures of consciousness that the phenomenologist found at the bottom level of her own mind.¹⁵

In this essay I will basically treat two topics: I. the human-animal relationship according to Husserl, II. the problem of lower level animals. I will also refer to the phenomenon of children as a point of comparison.

I. The human-animal relationship in general

The problem of animal belongs to the general sphere of intersubjective constitution. It appears as an anomalous sort of an alien subject, as the anomalous other. The prerequisite of a proper analysis of the *animal* is the phenomenological investigation of an alien *human* subject and intersubjective experience in general. Husserl’s point of departure towards the phenomenological clarification of intersubjective experience is the phenomenon of one’s *own body*. I have internal and external experiences of my own body, which thus appears as subjective and objective body, *Leib* and *Körper*.

In the constitution of my own body its subjective and objective moments are strongly entwined. The subjective and objective aspect of my body appear as interdependent moments of one and the same phenomenal system. These aspects do not have an independent existence outside of this system. The motivation of intersubjective experience is that I encounter human bodies, which show *a strong similarity to mine*; bodies that make behavioural reactions similar to those I make; that show gestures of joy and pain, and that apparently attempt to communicate with me. These experiences motivate me to associate an internal aspect to the external, to

¹³ Cf. E. HUSSERL, 1971, p. 10.

¹⁴ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Zur Lehre vom Wesen und zur Methode der eidetischen Variation. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1891-1935)*, ed. by Dirk Fonfara, Springer, New York, 2012, pp.328-334, 337f, 358-362. (Hereafter: *Zur Lehre vom Wesen*).

¹⁵ E.g. E. HUSSERL, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Zweiter Teil. 1921-28*, ed. by Iso Kern, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1973b, pp. 112-119. (Hereafter: *Intersubjektivität II*).

conceive the appearing, phenomenal body as the body of a conscious, experiencing subject, as a unity of subjective and objective body. I “associate” an internal, mental sphere; a “sphere of ownness” (“Eigenheitssphäre”) to the body that is similar to mine (also in its behavioural structures), and for Husserl this “association” means an intentional structure. I can only indirectly represent the other person’s inner mental sphere – here “sphere of ownness”, to which I cannot have a direct access, to which I cannot have direct access; otherwise – if I could experience the other person’s sphere of ownness directly – “ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same”.¹⁶ Husserl calls “*analogical appresentation*” the way through which I represent the internal aspect of the other person, where “analogical appresentation” is a concrete intentional act. *Empathy* refers to the *type* of intentionality, through which I am directed to another person, and experience them as another subject. Analogical appresentation and empathy is an *indirect* sort of intentionality. Through *analogical association* I learn to regard my body and the other person’s body as examples of one and the same type: examples of a person’s or subject’s body in general, which has a subjective and objective aspect.¹⁷

The social environment that emerges around me, to which I belong as its dependent moment – as an intrinsically intersubjective being –, is an implication of the self-normalizing structure of experience. I am surrounded by strangers, friends and relatives – all of whom are *human*. Animals appear on the horizon of my experience as anomalous or abnormal types of subject. They show a remote similarity to human bodies, but a much lower grade of similarity than “normal” or “usual” human bodies do. We articulate around ourselves a familiar surrounding (a home-world) of more or less familiar people; beyond which there is an unknown world of (mostly) strangers.¹⁸ But we also apperceive animated bodies, drastically different from human bodies: *living bodies of animals*. For Husserl the connection between human and animal bodies is the phenomenon of *an abnormal human body*. Husserl wrote about “distorted”, “abnormal” human bodies, which are partly similar to normal human bodies and partly to the body of a higher level animal.¹⁹ Animal body appears as an abnormal variant of a normal human body.²⁰ Furthermore: when *the lived animal body in general* is constituted, several typicalities

¹⁶ E. HUSSERL, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. by Stephan Strasser, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1973c, p. 139. English: E. HUSSERL, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. by Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1960, p. 109.

¹⁷ This reconstruction is mostly based upon Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*.

¹⁸ To this – and also to the self-normalization of experience – see Steinbock’s classical book. A. STEINBOCK, *Home and Beyond. Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1995.

¹⁹ E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität II*, p. 126. See also: C. Ciocan, “Husserl’s Phenomenology of Animality and the Paradoxes of Normality”, *Human Studies* 2017 (40), pp. 175-190.

²⁰ E. HUSSERL, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, p. 154.

In this context I would like to draw the attention to the study of Javier San Martín and Maria Luz Pintos Peñaranda who provide an astonishingly rich and detailed phenomenological and Husserlian analysis about animal bodies. J.

of animal bodies, that is to say: several sorts of animals – with the typical normality of their bodies and bodily behaviour – are also constituted on our experiential horizon.

Human world and animal world (the world of humans and the world of animals) are constituted in mutual correlation; and these worlds are bound together; they are constituted in an intertwined way. Animal world also has its subdomains and subregions like human world. In Husserl's interpretation, the constitution of the two worlds determine each other, and one interpenetrates the other. The world – as one and the same world – is constituted in such a manner that humanity and animality prove to be its necessary aspects, which structurally belong together. As Husserl says: "*The world is a humanized and animalized world*".²¹ Animality proves to be a structural implication of experience in general; through the emergence of variety of bodies; through the mutually intertwined co-constitution of normality and abnormality of bodies. Annabelle Dufourcq similarly emphasizes the inseparable intertwining of human and animal, through empathy. According to her conclusion: "A world without animals is impossible".²² We are capable of conceiving ourselves as "humans" only in so far, as we have the phenomenon of animal on our experiential horizon, with which we can compare and contrast ourselves as non-animal, as humans.

The human world – and humans as its inhabitants – could only emerge in contrast to an animal world, and – at the same time – empathetically bound to it; as partly similar to our world. In community with the animals, sharing a common world with them, we can experience both the *human in animal and the animal in human* at the same time; we can experience both the similarities that bind us together (we are all sensible, subjective beings), and the differences that divide us.²³ Differences which in turn, could only appear if the animals were still present; with whom we could compare ourselves to, and who are the structural implications of experience in general. We are *rational beings*, differing from animals, but also *sensible creatures*, which makes us partly equal to them. Animals – in the end – contribute to the

S. Martín and M. L. P. Peñaranda, "Animal Life and Phenomenology", in Steven Crowell, Lester Embree, Samuel J. Julian (eds.), *The Reach of Reflection. Issues for Phenomenology's Second Century*. Chapter 15. Electropress. Electronic, 2001.

²¹ E. HUSSERL, *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916-1937)*, ed. by Rochus Sowa, Springer, New York, 2008, p. 510. (Hereafter: *Lebenswelt*). See also: C. FERENCZ-FLATZ, "Humanizing the Animal, Animalizing the Human: Husserl on Pets", *Human Studies* 2017 (40), pp. 217–232.

²² A. DUFOURCQ, "Is a World without Animals Possible?" *Environmental Philosophy* 2014 (11), pp. 71-92. Here: p. 90.

²³ We can find a very detailed and sensitive analysis of the human-animal difference and relationship in the article of Carmine Di Martino. C. DI MARTINO, "Husserl and the Question of Animality", *Research in Phenomenology* 2014 (44), pp. 50-75.

constitution of the world in general; animals – with us, humans – are co-constituters of the phenomenon of world as such.

Husserl's "bestiary" – to use Mario Vergani's expression²⁴ – is incredibly rich and wide-ranging. He provides very detailed and careful investigations concerning the inner structures and regions of animal world; we can find several distinctions and juxtapositions on this matter in his work. There are domestic and wild animals, species of animals that are familiar to us, and also unknown species. There are *pets*, animals that we know and treat as friends, almost as relatives.²⁵ They make our world – the world – richer and deeper. Normality and abnormality could be understood and interpreted on the animal level – even on the level of one single individual animal, as the normativity of its experiences and actions –, there are normal and abnormal animals – for us and also for the animals themselves (within the sphere of animal experience). There are norms of animal experience and behaviour – in general, in the cases of particular species, and also on the level of individual animals. Husserl analyses the intraspecific and interspecific relationships of animals in a very careful and detailed manner.²⁶ Animals articulate the norms of relating to each other within their own group, and to members of different species on an individual, as well as collective level.²⁷

So far we followed the clue of *normativity* to analyse the human-animal relationship. As we mentioned however, Husserl had three particular ways to approach animal subjectivity: 1) empathy, 2) eidetic variations, 3) deconstructing-dismantling ("Abbau") method. Normativity played an essential role in each of these ways. *Ad 1. Empathy.* As we told earlier, for Husserl empathy is the fundamental mode through which we can experience the other as other; it is an intentional structure through which the other subject could be constituted. Empathy is motivated by bodily and behavioural similarities between the body of the other and mine. Empathy towards animals – that is to say: subjects with non-human lived bodies (Leiber) – is an extended form of empathy; through which anomalous subjects could be constituted (anomalous, regarding human subjects). The animal has a remote anatomical and behavioural similarity to us: it (she) has organs, gestures that resemble our own. We see emotions and feelings expressed in her bodily and facial gestures: we see pain and pleasure, fear and hope, anxiety and joy on its (her) *face*. Closer phenomenological analysis shows that the animal has a face in the

²⁴ VERGANI, 2020, p. 10. Mario Vergani's recently published study is one of the finest and most detailed that I read about Husserl's view on animals.

²⁵ Cf. C. FERENCZ-FLATZ, 2017.

²⁶ See: VERGANI, 2020.

²⁷ Op. cit.

Levinasian meaning: it has the message or command to us: “Don’t kill me!”.²⁸ We can experience a *personhood*²⁹ in the wide sense expressed in her face. To a certain degree we can even communicate in a rudimentary way with higher level animals; with pets, like dogs and cats.³⁰

Ad 2. Eidetic variations. According to Husserl I have the capacity to see and experience the essential features and structures of individual things, events and fact; and he calls this capability “intuition of essence” (“Wesensschauung”)³¹ or “eidetic intuition”; where “eidos” refers to an essential feature or structure of things, to a “species” or “general object” (“allgemeiner Gegenstand”). Husserl elaborated a special method in order to find out which are the essential attributes of an object or a special kind of fact, and which are not, that he called “eidetic variations”. This operation means that I vary the features of an object in phantasy, and see from which attributes I can abstract without eliminating the proper object in question as such, and which attributes I can remove, while preserving the entity, perhaps in a strongly modified form, but – altogether – as an example of the species. Eidetic variation helps us to find out the essential characteristic of a species. The eidetic features, which we get as result of eidetic variations, characterize and bind each example of a certain species.

According to Husserl, I can vary in phantasy a concrete example of man, in order to unfold which are the essential characteristics of man, those which belong to the species “man” with apriori necessity. I can do the same with the attributes and capabilities of human soul, (and for Husserl eidetic variations thus provide the methodological basis of an apriori, phenomenological psychology). In this way I can construct the eidos of “normal” and also “abnormal” man. In order to gain the eidos of “animal” I need to transgress even the boundaries of the eidos of “abnormal” human being. Through eidetic variations I am able to construct the normal, as well as the abnormal eidos of different eidetic regions; and also to demarcate the “abnormal” domain as subdomain within a peculiar sphere of entities or beings, and define that subdomain (of abnormal variants of the main eidetic domain) in its special normality. In this way I can construct the eidos of a typical or normal “dog”, as well as the eidos of an “abnormal”

²⁸ Dermot Moran raises the question in his classical monography on phenomenology, whether an animal has a face in the sense Emmanuel Lévinas was speaking about “face”. Moran literally says: “Does a fish have a face, or an amoeba? Does a human embryo in the womb have a face?”. (D. MORAN, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, p. 350.). I think, at least what regards animals, we can answer “yes”. We can surely experience an animal as the Other in the Levinasian sense, who is a subjective, sensible being.

²⁹ Cf. VERGANI, 2020.

³⁰ Cf. C. FERENCZ-FLATZ, 2017. Also: J-C Monod: “Why I Talk to My Dog” *Environmental Philosophy* 2014 (11), pp. 17-26.

³¹ See e.g. E. HUSSERL, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. by Walter Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Netherlands, 1950, [e.g.] §§3-4. (Hereafter: *Ideen I*).

dog (a sick, physically or mentally hurt dog, a dog with anatomic abnormalities, etc.). In this manner I can fix (and if necessary: revise) the eidetic boundaries of a particular species; and elaborate a specific eidetic ontology of it. This is a key method to having something like a *phenomenological zoology*.

Ad 3. Dismantling-deconstructing method. When I reflect on to my own consciousness, I can disclose several layers of subjectivity, which are built upon each other. There are three main layers: 1) intellect (or rationality – conceptual thought, language), 2) perception, 3) sensation (flow of hyletic data or sensations). I can reconstruct animal subjectivity by abstracting the higher levels; and see, what a subject which only possesses the lower layers might be: a subject which is only capable of perception, or even less: of sensing (*Empfinden*), and has only an environment built up exclusively of hyletic data (sensations). Here we should mention that Husserl is fully aware of the fact that consciousness is embodied, and every conscious activity implies a sort of embodiment or structures of incarnation. So, to lower levels of subjective, conscious accomplishments also belong structures of embodiment. Furthermore, Husserl is also aware of the other fact, that consciousness has an organic nature, and we cannot remove a single structural moment or element from it without changing the whole; and the removal of an entire structural layer could transform the entire subjectivity even more drastically or radically.³² For this reason, we have a limited access to lower level forms of subjectivity; but we still have a phenomenological access, no matter how limited it is.

Instinctive or instinctual intentionality is a crucial topic in the context of dismantling-deconstructing approach of animal (or lower level) subjectivity. Husserl – as we at least know from the classic monography of Nam-In Lee³³ –, from the beginning of the 1920s onwards, devoted much time and energy to elaborate a phenomenological theory of instincts; and he also tried to remove the naturalistic connotations and connections from his interpretation of this concept. Instinctual intentionality means *a passive directedness*, a teleological structure in the consciousness, which is directed to the constitution of certain contents, patterns or relationships; it is a motivational structure within the consciousness that urges the subject to achieve certain goals or to behave in a certain way. According to Husserl, every level of subjectivity belongs to a general level and structural-system of instinctive intentionality: to rationality, perception and sensation, as a passive way of constitution, which is characteristic to the level in question.

³² To problems of “layer-cake” model see: S. CROWELL, “Twenty-First-Century Phenomenology? Pursuing Philosophy with and after Husserl”, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 2019, pp. 40, 43, T. MOONEY, “Merleau-Ponty and developing and coping reflectively”, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, 2019, p. 65.

³³ N-I LEE, *Edmund Husserls Phänomenologie der Instinkte*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 1993.

It is indispensable to take into account the proper instinctual structures when we reconstruct the lower levels of subjectivity.

Husserl combines the phylogenetic and ontogenetic way of reconstructing lower levels of subjectivity. That means he made comparisons between human child and animal from time to time; describing the consciousness of a *child* – and more importantly of a very young child, an infant, sometimes even an embryo – as a structurally immature form of subjectivity. From the point of view of phenomenological psychology, the closer analysis of childhood or infant consciousness could be a very fruitful topic for the understanding of a purely perceptive or – on lower level – even merely sensing consciousness; as well as for a more precise explanation of animal consciousness, through the similarities.³⁴

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The main goal of this study is to provide phenomenological means to the reconstruction of lower levels of subjectivity – from the phenomenological point of view this is supposed to be one of the main achievements of the description of animal and childhood subjectivity. In the next section we will partly treat the question: how far could empathy reach – in a phenomenologically legitimate way? With what entities could we empathize in a phenomenologically motivated, intelligible form; that is to say: which entities – or beings – could we experience properly as alien (*fremde*) subjects, as subjective beings like us? The true aim of such phenomenological investigations is to unfold the lowest level of consciousness, the simplest form of subjectivity. In contemporary philosophy of mind, this lowest level of consciousness, this simplest form of subjectivity is called ‘minimal mind’.³⁵ There are two fields for such reconstructions: the lower level animals, especially lower invertebrates, and the problem of primal child (*Urkind*), more specifically: the phenomenon of embryonic mind. Ultimately the question is, which living beings – on which level of biological complexity – could be constituted as conscious in a phenomenologically legitimate manner, which not and why. As we indicated earlier, we don’t want to categorically exclude that lower level living beings – under the level of animals – could also possess a certain sort of consciousness in the wider sense (such as proto-consciousness with a proto-self), but in this study – on the one hand

³⁴ In Husserl: e.g. *Intesubjektivität III*, p. 167. Cf. also: VERGANI, 2020.

³⁵ Cf. V. TORLEY, *The Anatomy of a Minimal Mind*, Ph.D. Thesis, 2007. Hyperlink: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ec7b/27e5a8e1cea7910df7a0c8cefb20a1180cf4.pdf?_ga=2.235048641.1949438624.1592931283-1490967708.1592931283 (Accessed: 22 June 2020).
B. HUEBNER, “Minimal Minds”, In Tom L. Beauchamp and Raymond G. Frey (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 441-468.

– we are led by the presupposition, that only animals with a nervous system are capable of conscious activity, and – on the other hand – the main topic of our research is consciousness in the strict sense – which is phenomenal, lived, subjective experience.

II. Lower level animals as a leading clue to lower levels of subjectivity

The fundamental question concerning a phenomenological inquiry into the deepest layers of subjectivity is the limit and range of empathy towards living beings. In the third book of *Ideas* Husserl says, that “It would therefore not exclude plants' having sensitivities after all; it only means that we would be incapable of recognizing them, because there is lacking any bridge of empathy and of mediately determined analysis”.³⁶ In many textual places – as we told earlier – Husserl tends to attribute a consciousness in the strict sense only to living beings with a nervous system. Further crucial questions in this context: what makes special “nervous system” from the phenomenological point of view – when “nervous system”, under the phenomenological reduction, counts as a constituted transcendent entity “outside” the world? And: what does a minimal subject look like for the phenomenological reflection? First of all: how far could a phenomenologically legitimate and motivated empathy reach? In Husserl's view the remote – but still existing – anatomical and behavioural similarities and parallelisms could motivate empathy towards a living being, which is perhaps very different from us. We can make a phenomenological analysis of anatomic and behavioural peculiarities of an animal in *functional* regard. The animal in question (such as an ape, a cat, a dog, etc.) has sense organs, motor organs, organs of metabolism (to digest food, to vacate excrement); to behave roughly similar to us (roughly similar reactions of pain and joy), etc.

Especially in the description of *Ideas II*, the phenomenon of “*organ*” has a particular importance in the constitution of bodily existence. Organs are parts of the objective, physical body, but they could also be interpreted as moments which integrate the subject (as bodily subject) into the causal system of nature, and which represent certain functions, which enable the being-in-the-world³⁷ of subject. In *Ideas II*, the entire body as such appears as “an organ of the will” (“Willensorgan”);³⁸ as an organ composed of organs. In Husserl's interpretation, the

³⁶ E. HUSSERL, *Ideen III*, p. 10. English: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Third Book. Phenomenology and the Foundation of the Sciences*, trans. by Ted Klein and William Pohl, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Netherlands, 1980, pp. 8-9.

³⁷ Sometimes Husserl uses this Heideggerian term also. Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Lebenswelt*, pp. 462, 490. Also: “life-in-the-world” (“in-der-Welt-Leben”): op. cit. pp. 258, 385.

³⁸ E. HUSSERL, *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. by Marly Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Netherlands, 1952, pp. 158f, 252f. (Hereafter: *Ideen II*).

subject is necessarily an embodied, incarnated being, and she could only exist in this way. As he wrote in a manuscript from 1935: “A person cannot be concrete, without having a subjective body [Leib] as objective body [Körper]”.³⁹ The organs of the objective body serve as mediation between the subject and her world; to form a connection between spirit and nature, sphere of *motivation* and domain of *causality*. In this regard the *nervous system* has a special role.

The nervous system is a rather problematic topic in phenomenological respect. At first sight it seems to be at odds with the famous “principle of all principles” of phenomenology, according to which the ultimate source of every knowledge is “originally giving intuition”.⁴⁰ We cannot really see the nerves, or – more precisely – the nervous system *during functioning*; we need technological support to make its functioning visible, such as an fMRI. In Husserl’s age, through precise and detailed anatomical observations and investigations, the functional role of nervous system in the mediation between psychological and physiological processes, in the realization of the psychophysical dependence of soul on the body was already a deeply known and widely accepted information, even fact. It – the peculiar functional role and particular ways of factual functioning – was still a scientific construction or hypothesis, no matter how well confirmed in scientific regard, rather than a fact that we could witness with our own bare eyes. It seems we must exclude our positive scientific knowledge in the phenomenological reduction. Husserl, however, had several types of phenomenological reduction; even the extended version of reduction (intersubjective reduction),⁴¹ in which we can apply the knowledge of intersubjective community concerning the objective, mind-transcendent, physical features and causal laws of the world, in a phenomenologically legitimate way. By the time of *Ideas* (1912) Husserl already had this extended type of phenomenological reduction. In *Ideas II* he devoted several pages⁴² to the problem of nervous system from a phenomenological regard; where it appeared as special bodily organ, which mediates between spirit and nature, soul and the external world, and which realizes concretely the *psychophysical dependence* of soul on the body.

In this way we can identify the nervous system as a special organ and sublayer in the constitution of the body, which contributes to the being-in-the-world of the subject; and which connects the sphere of subjectivity to objectivity, and more concretely, to mind-independent

³⁹ E. HUSSERL, *Zur Lehre vom Wesen*, p. 380.

⁴⁰ E. HUSSERL, *Ideen I*, p. 51.

⁴¹ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil. 1905-1920*, ed. by Iso Kern, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1973, pp. 78f, 178f, 188f, 447ff. (Hereafter: *Intersubjektivität I*).

⁴² E. HUSSERL, *Ideen II*, pp. 135-143, 211, 226-231, 245, 288-297.

transcendence.⁴³ Nervous system, and especially its sensorimotor parts, appear as meeting-point of causality and motivation. Nervous system, under the phenomenological reduction, possesses the *meaning* of being a constitutive organ, which contributes to the constitution of the embodied being-in-the-world of a subject in a fundamental way. The complexity of nervous system correlates with a complexity of being-in-the-world; the more complex a nervous system is, the more complex and higher grade of intentionality a living being is capable of. The other way round: a simpler grade of complexity of nervous system refers to (constitutes) a simpler way of being-in-the-world. This way leads us to the problem and possible phenomenological treatment of minimal mind; to a living being that has the anatomically and functionally simplest apparatus to conceive it as a being which is probably conscious in the strict sense. This route also defines the limits of such an empathy, which constitutes another subject in a phenomenologically legitimate, motivated manner. We finally arrive at a subject, who is very far from us in regard to biological complexity, but who has a nervous system, and shares a very remote anatomical similarity with us, so we can intelligibly empathize with it, and constitute it a conscious subject – and who, according to Husserl, is a *jellyfish* (Qualle).⁴⁴

As we mentioned in the previous section, Husserl's "bestiary" is quite large; he treats a wide variety of animals; not only higher level living beings (such as apes, dogs, cats, etc.), but lower level ones too, such as insects, like bees and ants. He makes comparisons between humans and insects (such as bees and ants), human society and "state" of bees or ants.⁴⁵ Insects are invertebrates, but they already have a rather complicated nervous system, with a relatively high level of centralization. We can go, however, still deeper. As indicated, according to Husserl, it is the jellyfish, with its decentralized nervous system, which is probably the simplest

⁴³ We can also find phenomenological investigations on the nervous system in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*; which is a book that has also a hidden, non-philosopher protagonist, namely Johann Schneider, who suffered severe brain-damage in the Great War; and many of his psychological functions were damaged too. Through the phenomenological analysis of his case Merleau-Ponty attempts to prove on the one hand the holistic character of embodied existence (if one single element or structure is changed in the system, the whole system changes with it too), and – on the other hand – trying to show the phenomenologically constitutive role of nervous system too. (M. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1945).

Concerning a phenomenology of nervous system, we should also mention neurophenomenology, and especially the work of Francisco Valera. (Valera, "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 1996 [3], pp. 330-349). See also: S. GALLAGHER AND D. ZAHAVI, *The Phenomenological Mind. An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, Routledge, New York, 2008, pp. 33-38.

⁴⁴ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität II*, pp. 112-119. Also: E. HUSSERL, *Transzendentaler Idealismus. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908-1921)*, ed. by Robin D. Rollinger and Rochus Sowa, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2003, pp. 121, 163.

⁴⁵ See: E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität III*, p. 183.

subject, which has consciousness in the strict sense.⁴⁶ What might such a consciousness look like?

We can remove the upper layers of consciousness, which are rationality and articulated perception, and can keep the level of pure hyletic flow with its peculiar temporality. This *minimal level* of subjectivity still has an egoic structure: there is an experiencing ego, who lives in this hyletic streaming, who instinctively reacts to certain changes of this stream, and strives for self-preservation;⁴⁷ that is to say: strives to realize such hyletic contents which support the self-preservation, self-sustainment of the organism in question. Such an organism is surrounded by a constantly changing hyletic environment, whose changes however, show certain *patterns* and *periodicity*, which grant a certain degree of *predictability* for the subject. This limited predictability lays down the structural foundations for the *protentions* of the organism in question; so, it will anticipate or expect some hyletic events under certain conditions. The organism, in turn, could *adapt* instinctively to the changes in patterns and periodicity of hyletic contents, and to the structural and essential changes of the environment. It can *modify* its *expectations*; that is to say: it can *learn*. One of Husserl's most important convictions is that *life could never be fully mechanistic*; not even in its most primitive form, not even on the lowest level; life everywhere is about change, freedom, motivation and learning – even on the level of animals. “The motivation is the fundamental law of spiritual life” – says Husserl in *Ideas II*;⁴⁸ *and motivation is already present on the level of animality*, as a fundamental law of every single form of psychic life.

The most primitive form of psychic life involves necessarily *embodiment*. The hyletic flow – which represents the environing world of the organism – is connected by *kinaesthetic* movements and proprioceptive experiences. The organism – even the simplest one, who is capable of conscious activity – experiences itself as an embodied being; it adjusts its bodily

⁴⁶ In their recently published study, Andrew Barron and Colin Klein articulates the hypothesis, according to which insects already has the functional centres, which enables them of possessing a phenomenal consciousness; that is to say, consciousness in the strict sense. In their opinion, however, the lowest level in biological complexity where consciousness emerges, is the level of insects – and below this grade the functional apparatus is missing for consciousness. So, they deny that worms or jellyfishes could have consciousness.

See: A. BARRON and C. KLEIN, “What insects can tell us about the origins of consciousness?”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)* 2016 (Vol. 113, no. 18.), pp. 4900-4918.

⁴⁷ According to Husserl “self-preservation” (“Selbsterhaltung”) is one of the most fundamental instincts of an ego; where he tries to understand the notion of “self-preservation” in an anti-naturalistic, non-biological way; interpreting it as passive directedness to constitute certain contents and relationships. Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie. Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik (Texte aus dem Nachlass 1908 – 1937)*, ed. by Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr, Springer, New York, 2014, pp. 93-102. (Hereafter: *Grenzprobleme*). See also: N-I LEE, *Edmund Husserls Phänomenologie der Instinkte*, pp. 168ff, 193ff, 211ff.

⁴⁸ E. HUSSERL, *Ideen II*, p. 220.

movements, behaviour to the changes of environment; it strives after normalization of its experiences, actions and behaviour, which is an instinctual realization of self-preservation or self-sustainment, as sustainment of a bodily being. The living being experiences and conceives itself as a “threatened existence” (“bedrohte Existenz”), which it must protect.⁴⁹ According to Husserl all of this applies to a jellyfish. A jellyfish has a certain world and world-experience⁵⁰ – which is a submarine environment, with its typicalities, normalities, and more or less predictable changes. This environment is its home. In Husserl’s interpretation, a jellyfish is already a minimal subject; but one which is a subject in the strict sense, and for whom life and staying alive matters.



Husserl’s other way to the minimal subject is the problem of *child*; and especially the earliest phases of childhood; partly the newborn child and partly the possible subjectivity of an embryo. We can say, that it is the *ontogenetic way* to a minimal subject and minimal mind. As we mentioned earlier, from time to time Husserl makes comparisons between the mind (or consciousness) of an animal and a child.⁵¹ For Husserl the child represents an immature form of human subjectivity. Regarding this immaturity, a child could be conceived as an analogy of animal subjectivity. According to Husserl, however, in the child there is a teleological directedness to rationality and also an instinctual openness to infinity, which is missing from animal beings. These are pre-existing potentialities in the child that we cannot find in animals. In the child the potentialities and structures – which are actually and fully present in a normal human adult – are so to say, embedded in each other; where the potentialities and structures of higher levels activate gradually as the child grows older; one after the other, the higher level emerges and evolves from the lower.

Husserl spoke about a “first” and “second” childhood.⁵² The “first” is the first awakening of the transcendental ego, in her embryonic being in the womb of her mother. In this form the transcendental ego represents a sort of minimal mind and is at this stage a minimal subject. She experiences a hyletic flow; which makes up her original envioning world; and she lives in instinctual kinaesthetic movements. In this period her world is the womb of her mother. She –

⁴⁹ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität III*, p. 601.

⁵⁰ Cf. E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität II*, p. 116.

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. E. HUSSERL, *Intersubjektivität II*, pp. 115ff; *Intersubjektivität III*, pp. 172f, 184f, 595f, 621f; *C-Manuskripte*, pp. 105, 108, 170, 443-446 (hereafter: *C-Manuskripte*); *Grenzprobleme*, pp. 218-227.

⁵² Cf. e.g. E. HUSSERL, *C-Manuskripte*, pp. 73ff. Cf. also: N. DEPAZ, “The Husserlian Theory of Intersubjectivity as alterology. Emergent theories and wisdom traditions in the light of genetic phenomenology”, in Dermot Moran and Lester Embree (eds.), *Phenomenology: Critical Concepts in Philosophy. Volume 2*, 2004, pp. 201-214; especially 207f.

the transcendental ego in her first childhood -- demonstrates the most fundamental structures of a subjectivity possible: egoic structure, hyletic flow, kinaesthetic movements, instinctual tendencies and already embodied existence. In her second childhood the transcendental ego, as a newborn child, has a more articulated world, in an original and instinctive bond with her mother.⁵³ The transcendental ego in this second stage of general development has a world in a stricter sense than the embryo; and she constitutes and articulates a world, which is closer to ours – to the world of adult, rational subjects –, than the embryo’s womb-like environment. In contrast to the embryonic ego, the newborn child has not only a mere flow of hyletic data, but she is already capable of perception. She experiences a perceptive environment, in which she “navigates”, moves in an essentially instinctive manner.⁵⁴

Conclusion

In this study we attempted to show the main features of Husserl’s interpretation of animal consciousness – and in some parts of this essay we also referred to his comparative analyses concerning the similarities and differences between animals and (human) children. The main idea of our paper was that the phenomenological – and particularly Husserlian – investigations on animal mind could also provide guidelines to natural scientific research. If we have a clear view of what the phenomenal-phenomenological structure of lower levels of consciousness, and – in particular – of animal mind might be, then we also have more clues for positive scientific research, about what to look for in the objective, functional apparatus of animals, and where. The main aim of such investigations – from an epistemological regard – is to unfold the phenomenon of “*minimal mind*”, the most primitive sort of *consciousness* in the strict sense (which is phenomenal, lived experience); and to contribute to the scientific elaboration of this problem-field. In my opinion, if we have a more precise explanation of the phenomenon and problem of minimal mind, then we could get closer to understanding the fundamental nature of consciousness and why it appears in the natural world.

⁵³ Cf. D. ZAHAVI, *Husserl’s Phenomenology*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2003, p. 113, A. PUGLIESE “Triebshäre und Urkindheit des Ich”, *Husserl Studies* 2009 (25), p. 154

⁵⁴ In this context I would especially highlight the study of Alice Pugliese, who deployed careful phenomenological analyses concerning Husserl’s notion of “primal child” (“Urkind”); particularly with regard to the phenomena of instincts and instinctual intentionality. In this study she shows us the primal child “as a transcendental subject pre-forming the way the world appears to us” in a fundamentally instinctive manner. A. PUGLIESE, “Triebshäre und Urkindheit des Ich”, *Husserl Studies* 2009 (25), pp. 141–157.